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ADDRESS OF PRESIDENT ROOSEVELT AT
CAIRO, ILLINOIS ❧ ❧ OCTOBER 3, 1907



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MEN OF ILLINOIS, AND YOU, MEN OF KENTUCKY AND MISSOURI:

I am glad to have the chance to speak to you to-day. This is the heart of what may be called the Old West, which we now call the Middle West, using the term to denote that great group of rich and powerful States which literally forms the

heart of the country. It is a region whose people are distinctively American in all their thoughts, in all their ways of looking at life; and in its past and its present alike it is typical of our country. The oldest men present can still remember the pioneer days, the days of the white-tilted ox wagon, of the emigrant, and of the log cabin in which that emigrant first lived when he settled to his task as a pioneer farmer. They were rough days, days of hard work, and the people who did that

work seemed themselves uncouth and forbidding to visitors who could not look below the surface. It is curious and amusing to think that even as genuine a lover of his kind, a man normally so free from national prejudices as Charles Dickens, should have selected the region where we are now standing as the seat of his forlorn "Eden" in Martin Chuzzlewit. The country he so bitterly assailed is now one of the most fertile and productive portions of one of the most fertile and

productive agricultural territories in all the world, and the dwellers in this territory represent a higher average of comfort, intelligence, and sturdy capacity for self-government than the people in any tract of like extent in any other continent. The land teems with beauty and fertility, and but a score of years after Dickens wrote it was shown to be a nursery and breeding ground of heroes, of soldiers and statesmen of the highest rank, while the rugged worth of the rank and file of the

citizenship rendered possible the deeds of the mighty men who led in council and in battle. This was the region that brought forth mighty Abraham Lincoln, the incarnation of all that is best in democratic life; and from the loins of the same people, living only a little farther south, sprang another of our greatest Presidents, Andrew Jackson, "Old Hickory"—a man who made mistakes, like most strong men, but a man of iron will and incorruptible integrity, fearless, upright, devoted to the welfare of his

countrymen, bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh, a typical American if ever there was one.

I commend a careful reading of Martin Chuzzlewit to the pessimists of to-day, to the men who, instead of fighting hard to do away with abuses while at the same time losing no jot of their buoyant hopefulness for the country, insist that all our people, socially and industrially, in their private lives no less than as politicians, newspaper men, and business men, are at

a lower ebb than ever before. If ever any one of you feels a little downcast over the peculiarly gloomy view of the present taken by some well-meaning pessimist of to-day, you will find it a real comfort to read Martin Chuzzlewit, to see what a well-meaning pessimist of the past thought of our people sixty-five years ago; and then think of the extraordinary achievement, the extraordinary gain, morally no less than materially, of those sixty-five years. Dickens can be read by us

now with profit; Elijah Pogram, Hannibal Chollop, Jefferson Brick and Scadder have their representatives to-day, plenty of them; and the wise thing for us to do is to recognize that these are still types of evil in politics, journalism, business, and private life, and to war against them with all our hearts. But it is rank folly to regard these as the only, or the chief, types in our national life. It was not of much consequence whether Dickens made such an error or

not, but it would be of great consequence if we ourselves did ; for a foolish pessimism is an even greater foe of healthy national growth than a foolish optimism. It was not that Dickens invented characters or scenes that had no basis in fact ; on the contrary, what he said was true, as far as it went ; the trouble was that out of many such half truths he made a picture which as a whole was absurd ; for often a half truth is the most dangerous falsehood. It would be simply silly to be angry over Martin

Chuzzlewit; on the contrary, read it, be amused by it, profit by it; and don't be misled by it. Keep a lively watch against the present-day Pograms and Bricks; but above all, distrust the man who would persuade you to feel downhearted about the country because of these same Pograms and Bricks, past or present. It would be foolish to ignore their existence, or the existence of anything else that is bad in our national life; but it would be even more foolish to ignore the

vaster forces that tell for righteousness. Friends, there is every reason why we should fight whatever is evil in the present. But there is also every reason why we should feel a sturdy and confident hope for the future. There are many wrongs to right; there are many and powerful wrong doers against whom to war; and it would be base to shrink from the contest, or to fail to wage it with a high, a resolute will. But I am sure that we shall win in the contest, because

I know that the heart of our people is sound. Our average men and women are good men and women—and this is true in all sections of our country and among all classes of our countrymen. There is no other nation on earth with such vast natural resources, or with such a high standard of living and of industrial efficiency among its workers. We have as a nation an era of unexampled prosperity ahead of us; we shall enjoy it, and our children will enjoy it after us. The

trend of well-being in this country is upward, not downward; and this is the trend in the things of the soul as well as in the things of the body.

Government in its application is often a complicated and delicate work, but the principles of government are, after all, fairly simple. In a broad general way we should apply in the affairs of the national administration, which deals with the interests of all our eighty-odd millions of people, just the same rules that are necessary

in getting on with our neighbors in our several neighborhoods; and the nation as a whole should show substantially the same qualities that we would expect an honorable man to show in dealing with his fellows. To illustrate this, consider for a moment two phases of governmental action.

First as to international affairs. Among your own neighbors, among your friends, what is the attitude you like to see a man take toward his fellows, the attitude you wish each of your sons to take when

he goes out into the world? Is it not a combination of readiness and ability to hold his own if anyone tries to wrong him, while at the same time showing careful regard not only for the rights but for the feelings of others? Of course it is! Of course the type of man whom we respect, whom we are proud of if he is a kinsman, whom we are glad to have as a friend and neighbor, is the man who is no milksop, who is not afraid, who will not tolerate nor hesitate to resent

insult or injury, but who himself never inflicts insult or injury, is kindly, good-natured, thoughtful of others' rights—in short, a good man to do business with or have live in the next house or have as a friend. On the other hand, the man who lacks any of those qualities is sure to be objectionable. If a man is afraid to hold his own, if he will submit tamely to wrongdoing, he is contemptible. If he is a bully, an oppressor, a man who wrongs or insults others, he is even worse

and should be hunted out of the community. But, on the whole, the most contemptible position that can possibly be assumed by any man is that of blustering, of bragging, of insulting or wronging other people, while yet expecting to go through life unchallenged, and being always willing to back down and accept humiliation if readiness to make good is demanded.

Well, all this is just as true of a nation as of an individual, and in dealing

with other nations we should act as we expect a man who is both game and decent to act in private life. There are few things cheaper and more objectionable, whether on the part of the public man or of the private man, on the part of a writer or of a speaker, an individual or a group of individuals, than a course of conduct which is insulting or hurtful, whether in speech or act, to individuals of another nation or to the representatives of another nation or to another nation

itself. But the policy becomes infamous from the standpoint of the interests of the United States when it is combined with the refusal to take those measures of preparation which can alone secure us from aggression on the part of others. The policy of "peace with insult" is the very worst policy upon which it is possible to embark, whether for a nation or an individual. To be rich, unarmed, and yet insolent and aggressive, is to court well-nigh certain disaster. The only

safe and honorable rule of foreign policy for the United States is to show itself courteous toward other nations, scrupulous not to infringe upon their rights, and yet able and ready to defend its own. This nation is now on terms of the most cordial good will with all other nations. Let us make it a prime object of our policy to preserve these conditions. To do so it is necessary on the one hand to mete out a generous justice to all other peoples and show them courtesy and respect; and on

the other hand, as we are yet a good way off from the millenium, to keep ourselves in such shape as to make it evident to all men that we desire peace because we think it is just and right and not from motives of weakness or timidity. As for the first requisite, this means that not only the Government but the people as a whole shall act in the needed spirit; for otherwise the folly of a few individuals may work lasting discredit to the whole nation. The second requisite is more

easily secured—let us build up and maintain at the highest point of efficiency the United States Navy. In any great war on land we should have to rely in the future as we have relied in the past chiefly upon volunteer soldiers; and although it is indispensable that our little army, an army ludicrously small relatively to the wealth and population of this mighty nation, should itself be trained to the highest point and should be valued and respected as is demanded by the worth of the

officers and enlisted men, yet it is not necessary that this army should be large as compared to the armies of other great nations. But as regards the Navy all this is different. We have an enormous coast line, and our coast line is on two great oceans. To repel hostile attacks the fortifications, and not the Navy, must be used; but the best way to parry is to hit—no fight can ever be won except by hitting—and we can only hit by means of the Navy. It is utterly impossible to improvise even a

makeshift navy under the conditions of modern warfare. Since the days of Napoleon no war between two great powers has lasted as long as it would take to build a battle ship, let alone a fleet of battle ships; and it takes just as long to train the crew of a battle ship as it does to build it; and as regards the most important thing of all, the training of the officers, it takes much longer. The Navy must be built and all its training given in time of peace. When once war has broken out it

is too late to do anything. We now have a good Navy, not yet large enough for our needs, but of excellent material. Where a navy is as small as ours, the cardinal rule must be that the battle ships shall not be separated. This year I am happy to say that we shall begin a course which I hope will be steadily followed hereafter, that, namely, of keeping the battle-ship fleet alternately in the Pacific and in the Atlantic. Early in December the fleet will begin its voyage to the Pacific, and it will

number, friends, among its formidable fighting craft three great battle ships, named, respectively, the *Illinois*, the *Missouri*, and the *Kentucky*. It is a national fleet in every sense of the term, and its welfare should be, and I firmly believe is, as much a matter of pride and concern for every man in the farthest interior of our country as for every man on the seacoast. A long ocean voyage is mighty good training; and not the least good it will do will be to show just the points where our naval

program needs strengthening. Incidentally I think the voyage will have one good effect, for, to judge by their comments on the movement, some excellent people in my own section of the country need to be reminded that the Pacific coast is exactly as much a part of this nation as the Atlantic coast.

So much for foreign affairs. Now for a matter of domestic policy. Here in this country we have founded a great federal democratic republic. It is a government

by and for the people and therefore a genuine democracy; and the theory of our Constitution is that each neighborhood shall be left to deal with the things that concern only itself and which it can most readily deal with; so that town, county, city, and State have their respective spheres of duty, while the nation deals with those matters which concern all of us, all of the people, no matter where we dwell. Our democracy is based upon the belief that each individual ought to have the largest

measure of liberty compatible with securing the rights of other individuals, that the average citizen, the plain man whom we meet in daily life, is normally capable of taking care of his own affairs, and has no desire to wrong any one else; and yet that in the interest of all there shall be sufficient power lodged somewhere to prevent wicked people from trampling the weak under foot for their own gain. Our constant endeavor is to make a good working compromise whereby we shall

secure the full benefit of individual initiative and responsibility, while at the same time recognizing that it is the function of a wise government under modern conditions not merely to protect life and property, but to foster the social development of the people so far as this may be done by maintaining and promoting justice, honesty, and equal rights. We believe in a real, not a sham, democracy. We believe in democracy as regards political rights, as regards education, and, finally,

as regards industrial conditions. By democracy we understand securing, as far as it is humanly possible to secure it, equality of opportunity, equality of the conditions under which each man is to show the stuff that is in him and to achieve the measure of success to which his own force of mind and character entitle him. Religiously this means that each man is to have the right, unhindered by the state, to worship his Creator as his conscience dictates, granting freely to

others the same freedom which he asks for himself. Politically we can be said substantially to have worked out our democratic ideals, and the same is true, thanks to the common schools, in educational matters. But in industry there has not as yet been the governmental growth necessary in order to meet the tremendous changes brought about in industrial conditions by steam and electricity. It is not in accordance with our principles that literally despotic power should be put

into the hands of a few men in the affairs of the industrial world. Our effort must be for a just and effective plan of action which, while scrupulously safeguarding the rights of the men of wealth, shall yet, so far as is humanly possible, secure under the law to all men equality of opportunity to make a living. It is to the interest of all of us that the man of exceptional business capacity should be amply rewarded; and there is nothing inconsistent with this in our insistence that he shall not be guilty

of bribery or extortion, and that the rights of the wageworker and of the man of small means, who are themselves honest and hard working, shall be scrupulously safeguarded. The instruments for the exercise of modern industrial power are the great corporations which, though created by the individual States, have grown far beyond the control of those States and transact their business throughout large sections of the Union. These corporations, like the industrial conditions which

have called them into being, did not exist when the Constitution was founded; but the wise forethought of the founders provided, under the interstate commerce clause of the Constitution, for the very emergency which has arisen, if only our people as a whole will realize what this emergency is; for if the people thoroughly realize it, their governmental representatives will soon realize it also. The National Government alone has sufficiently extensive power and jurisdiction to exercise adequate con-

trol over the great interstate corporations.

While this thorough supervision and control by the National Government is desirable primarily in the interest of the people, it will also, I firmly believe, be to the benefit of those corporations themselves which desire to be honest and law-abiding.

Only thus can we put over these corporations one competent and efficient sovereign—the Nation—able both to exact justice from them and to secure justice for them, so that they may not be alternately

pampered and oppressed. The proposal need be dreaded only by those corporations which do not wish to obey the law or to be controlled in just fashion, but prefer to take their chances under the present lack of all system and to court the chance of getting improper favors as offsetting the chance of being blackmailed—an attitude rendered familiar in the past by those corporations which had thriven under certain corrupt and lawless city governments.

The first need is to exercise this Federal control in thoroughgoing and efficient fashion over the railroads, which, because of their peculiar position, offer the most immediate and urgent problem. The American people abhor a vacuum, and is determined that this control shall be exercised somewhere; it is most unwise for the railroads not to recognize this and to submit to it as the first requisite of the situation. When this control is exercised in some such fashion as it is now exercised

over the national banks, there will be no falling off in business prosperity. On the contrary, the chances for the average man to do better will be increased. Undoubtedly there will be much less opportunity than at present for a very few individuals not of the most scrupulous type to amass great fortunes by speculating in and manipulating securities which are issued without any kind of control or supervision. But there will be plenty of room left for ample legitimate reward for business gen-

ius, while the chance for the man who is not a business genius, but who is a good, thrifty, hard-working citizen, will be better. I do not believe that our efforts will have anything but a beneficial effect upon the permanent prosperity of the country; and, as a matter of fact, even as regards any temporary effect, I think that any trouble is due fundamentally not to the fact that the national authorities have discovered and corrected certain abuses, but to the fact that those abuses were there

to be discovered. I think that the excellent people who have complained of our policy as hurting business have shown much the same spirit as the child who regards the dentist and not the ulcerated tooth as the real source of his woe. I am as certain as I can be of anything that the course we are pursuing will ultimately help business; for the corrupt man of business is as great a foe to this country as the corrupt politician. Both stand on the same evil eminence of infamy. Against both it is

necessary to war; and if, unfortunately, in either type of warfare, a few innocent people are hurt, the responsibility lies not with us, but with those who have misled them to their hurt.

This is a rapidly growing nation, on a new continent, and in an era of new, complex, and ever-shifting conditions. Often it is necessary to devise new methods of meeting these new conditions. We must regard the past, but we must not regard only the past. We must also

think of the future; and while we must learn by experience, we can not afford to pay heed merely to the teachings of experience. The great preacher Channing in his essay on "The Union" spoke with fine insight on this very point. In commenting on the New England statesman Cabot, whom he greatly admired, he said that nevertheless "he had too much of the wisdom of experience; he wanted what may be called the wisdom of hope." He then continued in words which have a peculiar

fitness for the conditions of to-day: "We apprehend that it is possible to make experience too much our guide. There are seasons in human affairs, of inward and outward revolution, when new depths seem to be broken up in the soul, when new wants are unfolded in multitudes, and a new and undefined good is thirsted for. These are periods when the principles of experience need to be modified, when hope and trust and instinct claim a share with prudence in the guidance of affairs,

when in truth *to dare* is the highest wisdom."

These sentences should be carefully pondered by those men, often very good men, who forget that constructive change offers the best method of avoiding destructive change; that reform is the antidote to revolution; and that social reform is not the precursor but the preventive of socialism.

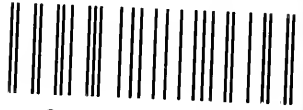


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